EMPLOYMENT 1992

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CONSULTATION DOCUMENT ON THE MAY DAY BANK HOLIDAY

Introduction

1. This Consultation Document seeks the views of interested organisations and the public on:

a) whether to retain the existing May Day bank holiday in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;

b) what alternative dates might be preferable; in particular, whether respondents would prefer an extra day added to the August bank holiday, or a new bank holiday on the last Monday in October.

Background

2. The first Monday in May was first celebrated as a bank holiday in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1978. It had been announced by the then Labour Government in 1976, without prior public consultation.

Objections to May Day bank holiday

3. Ever since its inception, the May Day bank holiday has attracted criticism. Most complaints have mentioned its position in the calendar, which leads to a "bunching" of holidays in the Spring. Easter, May Day and the late Spring bank holiday on the last Monday in May can all fall within five weeks of each other (as they did in 1992).

4. A strong body of opinion finds this very inconvenient, and feels that several long weekends in quick succession is excessive. This has led to suggestions that May Day be replaced by an alternative holiday. Some people have proposed adding a day to an existing bank holiday to make a longer break; others have said they would prefer a new bank holiday between September and Christmas, to break up a long stretch of holiday-free weeks.

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5. In particular, tourism interests have repeatedly recommended replacing May Day with a new bank holiday in October, since they believe that this would lengthen the tourism season. These calls have been echoed by Members of Parliament. When the House of Commons Employment Committee reported on Tourism in 1990, it referred to the British Tourist Authority's recommendation for moving the May Day holiday, and recommended that "the Government should consider the more even distribution of bank holidays".

Government Position

6. The May Day bank holiday has attracted criticism and is unpopular with many people. The Government thinks it likely that an alternative date could be found for England, Wales and Northern Ireland which was thought more convenient and more generally acceptable.

The Government would welcome comments from respondents on whether they would support a change to the present May Day bank holiday in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

7. The Government has no plans to change bank holidays in Scotland, where May Day has been a bank holiday since 1871. It would nevertheless welcome the views of interested parties and individuals.

Options for change

8. If respondents agree that a change to the May Day bank holiday is desirable, the Government would welcome views on what alternative might replace it. In particular, the Government would welcome views on two possible dates:

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a) Adding a day to the present August bank holiday

9. The August bank holiday falls on the last Monday in August. An extra day could be added to this holiday, thus giving a two day break around the end of August. This would extend an already popular bank holiday weekend, at a time of year when there are still reasonable chances of good weather. However, the two day break might prove inconvenient for some people, especially if it involved the closure of public buildings. It might also be thought too close to the start of the school term.

b) Creating a new holiday on the last Monday in October

10. This would introduce a new bank holiday in the period between September and Christmas where none exists at present. It might brighten up an otherwise drab time of year. It would also coincide with half term for many schools, which could be convenient for parents. However, it might inconvenience manufacturing industry by breaking an otherwise uninterrupted run of production during the autumn months.

The Government would welcome comments from respondents on which of these alternative dates they would prefer, if May Day were to be replaced.

The Government would also welcome comments on any extra costs that respondents feel either change could impose on them.

11. If respondents wish to suggest other possible dates to replace the May Day holiday, the Government would welcome their views. Annual bank holidays in Britain do not, by tradition, commemorate particular individuals, events or institutions, other than those associated with the Christian religion.

Timing of any change

12. Any change to the May Day bank holiday would be unlikely to come into effect before 1995.

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Deadline for responses

13. Responses to this Consultation Document should be sent to

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It would be helpful to have responses by **28 February 1993**.

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